Grade=19/20

Working with Youth and Adolescents Involved in the Criminal Justice System

Mary J. Baldwin

Our Lady of the Lake University

Asscher, J., Deković, M., Manders, W., Laan, P., Prins, P., & Arum, S. (2014). Sustainability of the effects of multisystemic therapy for juvenile delinquents in The Netherlands: Effects on delinquency and recidivism. *Journal Of Experimental Criminology, 10*(2), 227-243. doi:10.1007/s11292-013-9198-8

Researchers in this study shared that although there has been significant evidence in the U.S. alluding to the effectiveness of Multisystemic Therapy (MST) in youth involved in the criminal justice system, studies in Europe have been less conclusive regarding the effectiveness of the intervention. These researchers aimed to address the long term effectiveness of MST in reducing criminal behavior and involvement in adolescents from the Netherlands. In addition, they aimed to explore the effectiveness of the therapy within certain subgroups by conducting moderator tests for gender, age, ethnicity and problem severity. Participants in the study were recruited from local referring agencies. Participants were randomly assigned by a computerized program to either the MST condition or the “treatment as usual” (TAU) condition. The group sample consisted of 256 participants; 147 adolescents assigned to the MST condition and 109 assigned to the TAU condition. The MST treatment was based on family system and social ecological theories that aimed to influence key systems in the individual’s environment such as family, school, peer group and neighborhood contexts. Therapy was normally conducted in the home and treatment attempted to incorporate the whole family. The TAU condition in this study consisted of typical services provided to adolescents in the criminal justice system in the Netherlands which included individual or group counseling, supervision by probation officer or case manager as well as family based interventions. The outcome measures utilized aimed to assess externalizing problems and delinquent behaviors. Improvement in externalizing behaviors was measured by having parents complete the Child Behavior Checklist and the Disruptive Behaviors Disorder rating scales. Youth were asked to complete the Youth Self Report and the Self-Report Delinquency Scale. In addition, data was collected from the Judicial Registration system to assess for possible arrests and convictions of the participants. Overall effectiveness of treatment conditions was assessed by conducting an ANCOVA; outcome measures at follow up were set up as dependent variables, treatment condition as a factor and pre-intervention scores as co-variates. Subgroup effectiveness was assessed through moderator analysis on self-report data by conducting an ANCOVA with the moderator as a factor. Questionnaire data from participants and parents indicated significant MST treatment effects at follow up. However, results from the data analyzed from the Judicial Registration System indicated no significant differences between the two conditions in frequency or number of arrests at 6 months and at 2 years follow up. The subgroup moderator analysis suggested MST is equally effective regardless of gender, age or problem severity. In regard to ethnicity, MST was found more effective in native Dutch adolescents than migrant adolescents. Ultimately, based on their findings researchers in the study highlight the importance of gathering data from multiple sources when assessing the effectiveness of treatments with adolescents in the criminal justice system. In addition, the researchers also suggest it would be important for further research to explore the moderator effect found in the different ethnic groups. This article was note worthy as it raises questions regarding why adolescents and families reported higher treatment effects in the MST group than in the TAU group. MST is a systemic approach targeting multiple environments surrounding the adolescent. Perhaps there was an overall improvement in the dynamics of the family and other systems which was not accounted for in the study. It would be interesting to further explore the individual and family experiences in the MST condition to further understand what lead to the perception of the MST treatment being effective in the family system.

Case, A. D., & Hunter, C. D. (2014). Counterspaces and the Narrative Identity Work of offender-labeled African American youth. *Journal Of Community Psychology, 42*(8), 907-923. doi:10.1002/jcop.21661

This article studies the narrative identify work of Offender- Labeled African American youth as they participated in a program aimed at empowering them through community involvement and agency. The reseachers sought to explore the effects of the program on the youth’s self-narratives as well as what aspects of the program made contributions to their narratives. Researchers also aimed to understand how youth labeled as offenders may be able resist these societal imposed labels through narrative identity work within the context of a positive environmental outlet such as the Peer Ambassadors (PA) program. The PA program is presented as an intervention program which targets youth ages 10-19 years old who have had involvement or are at risk of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system. The program’s philosophy is “intervention by doing.” Therefore, the program aims in helping youth identify themselves as assets and contributors in their communities whose potential is activated by becoming involved in activities that serve purposes beyond themselves. The study was conducted as a case study of the PA program through a 9-month ethnography in which one of the authors was situated as a participant observer in the program. All participants and staff in the program were invited to participate in the study. Of the nine youth and two staff who were invited, three youth and two staff agreed to participate in the study. All youth and staff in the program identified as African American. The Youth in the program had an age average of 18.67 years and had been involved with the PA program for 2.9 years on average. Individual interviews were conducted to access the following inquiries; youth’s experiences in their environments, youth’s perceptions and narratives regarding the benefits of their involvement in the PA program and how youth narrated their relationships with adults both inside and outside of the PA program. Adult interviews consisted of program philosophy and model, roles within the program and the quality of relationship with youth. Interview data was then transcribed and analyzed by researchers for common themes across participant categories. Results indicated the youth in the PA program had developed affirming counter-narratives. The narratives that surfaced in the study were oppression narratives, resistance narratives, reimagined personal narratives and reimagined collective narratives. The findings of the study allude to the youth’s narratives being influenced by the counter space or environment provided by the program’s belief system, roles assigned to the youth, resources provided to the youth as part of their roles and the relationships they developed within the program. This study is noteworthy as it provides guidance to the clinician in how to disrupt processes of exclusion and deficits these youth may be experiencing.The findings of the study allude to the importance of positive environmental factors in youths developing self-narratives. Providing opportunities and resources to re-author narratives from dominant narratives imposed by society, such as criminal or deviant, can be invaluable as an intervention in working with adolescents involved in the criminal justice system. Adolescence can be a time where an individual explores and develops their identity and self-concept as a result of their interactions within their social context. If an adolescents environment is limited in opportunities to succeed and instead is surrounded by risk factors such as gangs, drugs and negative behaviors they might end up making choices that may haunt them for their rest of their lives. Therefore, as we intervene as counselors, it is important to help these adolescents access alternative opportunities to re-author themselves in positive environments despite any pitfalls they may have experienced in the past.

Gingerich, W. J., & Peterson, L.T. (2013). Effectiveness of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy: A systematic qualitative review of controlled outcome studies. *Research on Social Work Practice, 23* (2), 266-283. doi: 10.177/1049731512470859

This study was a systematic qualitative review of all available outcome studies of solution focused brief therapy and aimed to evaluate the evidence of its effectiveness. Researchers desired to identify studies where the population and problems being addressed were relevant to the population practitioners are encountering in the field of Psychology. Study selection was based from all available studies that utilized controlled methods, measured end-of-treatment outcomes and utilized SFBT as a treatment modality. Data was abstracted and analyzed by utilizing a data abstraction form which recorded problem type, setting, SFBT techniques used, duration of SFBT, comparison groups and treatments, sample size and key features of the study design, outcome and measures used, treatment effects and comparisons. Forty-three studies met selection criteria which yielded six groupings; child academic and behavior problems, adult mental health, marriage and family, occupational rehabilitation, health and aging and crime and delinquency. There were 14 studies in the child academic and behavior problems group, with 11 of the 14 conducted in a school setting. Most studies found in this category found significant positive changes due to SFBT alluding to the effectiveness of SFBT in working with children. Four studies were identified where SFBT was utilized to address crime and delinquency. Of the four studies, three of the studies targeted adolescents in the criminal justice system. These studies point to the effectiveness of SFBT in improving problem solving skills, reducing antisocial tendencies and behavioral concerns during incarceration. Two studies in particular found lower stress level and aggression as well as improved coping in adolescents involved in the criminal justice system. Overall, of the 43 studies analyzed, 74% yielded positive results from SFBT and an additional 23% reported positive trends. Only one study reported failed to identify observable benefits from SFBT. SFBT was found to consistently provide participants with positive outcomes just as well as other treatment alternatives and in some cases it had stronger effects than alternative treatments. The most significant SFBT effect was found in adult mental health studies where SFBT was utilized with depressed outpatients. This study found considerable evidence for the effectiveness of SFBT in a number of fields, including adolescents involved in the criminal justice system. Overall, the implications of this study suggest SFBT has gained considerable empirical evidence over the years and practitioners should feel confident in utilizing SFBT. In addition, there is growing evidence SFBT can achieve treatment goals in less time than other treatment modalities. Alluding to its utility in a resource limited mental health environment.

Ikonomopoulos, J., Smith, R. L.& Schmidt, C. ( 2015). Integrating narrative therapy within rehabilitative programming for incarcerated adolescents. *Journal of Counseling &Development, 93,* 460-470. doi: 10.1002/jcad.12044

In this article, researchers aimed to assess the effectiveness of a 10 session narrative therapy intervention with adolescents placed in a juvenile bootcamp facility located in the central southern area of the United states. The researchers aimed to address the question; “ What is the degree of efficacy for a rehabilitative program that integrates narrative therapy for reducing clinically relevant psychological symptoms among youth incarcerated at a juvenile justice boot camp facility?” Participantsin the study consisted of eight adolescents placed in a juvenile justice bootcamp facility. The group consisted of six males and two females with ages ranging from 15 to 17 years old. Participants were selected based on their scores from the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument at intake indicating clinically significant needs. The MYSI is an assessment administered to all incoming adolescents during the intake process and attempts to assess needs such as alcohol and drug abuse, anger and irritability, depressed-anxious moods, suicidal ideations, thought disturbances and traumatic experiences. In addition, the participants in the study had been evaluated by a psychiatrist contracted by the juvenile facility and had received diagnosis ranging from bipolar disorder NOS, ADHD, Mood Disorder NOS and substance abuse disorders. Some of the individuals selected for the study reported a history of prior mental health services. Treatment consisted of 10 sessions of individual narrative therapy utilizing the progression of sessions in Maps of Narrative Practice by White, 2007. Techniques utilized in treatment included externalizing conversations, mapping and evaluating the effects of the problem, exploring alternative outcomes and re-authoring conversations. Treatment effect was assessed using an A-B and A-B-A single case research design utilizing Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) as an outcome measure. The baseline measure consisted of 5 weeks of typical treatment at the facility which included anger management and substance abuse treatment once a week. The treatment phase began after the fifth week baseline measure when the first narrative session was introduced. Narrative therapy treatment ranged from 4 to 10 weeks with each individual. Withdrawal measures were collected 3 weeks after the treatment phase. The measure to assess treatment outcome was the BSI. Data analysis consisted of the PEM procedure which yields data in treatment phase that overlaps with median data point in the baseline phase. Results indicated narrative therapy to be significantly effective in reducing scores in the Global Severity Index (GSI) of the BSI in five of the eight participants. Efficacy of treatment in targeted sub-scales ranged from very effective to effective in all participants with the exception of one case where treatment effects were inconclusive. The findings in this study offer promising support in integrating narrative therapy as an alternative treatment in working with incarcerated youth. In particular, narrative therapy can assist participants in exploring new meanings in their experiences, further developing their identities and re-authoring or challenging existing narratives that may have been imposed by society. By utilizing the therapeutic space while incarcerated, youth could utilize their time while incarcerated to develop alternative narratives of resilience, hope and personal strength prior to their release. These alternative narratives could assist them as they are reintegrated in their environment once they return home.

Jordan, C., Lehmann, P., Whitehill, K., Huynh, L., Chigbu, K., Schoech, R., & . Bezner, D. (2013). Youthful Offender Diversion Project: YODA. *Best Practice In Mental Health, 9*(1), 20-30.

This article explores the development and outcome measures of the youth offender diversion project (YODA) developed in response to an increasing number of arrests for violence towards non intimate-partner family members such as mothers and sisters in Tarrant County. In this article, youth offenders are described as individuals between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five who have been charged with family violence. The developers of the program noted deficiencies in the system of care accessible to these youth. In particular, they found a need to assess the short and long term strengths, risks and needs of these individuals. The program was developed in an attempt to utilize youths’ strengths and resources such as family ties and supportive relationships to promote positive behaviors and assist youth in making a transition into adulthood. Solution-focused brief therapy is used as the clinical approach in the program as the developers of the program aim to use a strengths based approach that develops youths talents, knowledge and resources to achieve goals. The long term outcome for YODA is aimed at reducing recidivism in the participants of the program. The researchers in the article aim to evaluate the program in three areas: “Has YODA been implemented according to plan? Does YODA operate in the intended manner? Is YODA meeting the intended outcomes?” The implementation and process evaluation is measured by the collaboration between YODA and court personnel in identifying individuals who are complying with the program and those who have not. Program fidelity addresses whether the SFBT component is being utilized adequately in session and is measured by a one time assessment that is provided to the client during one of their visits in the program. The article indicates quality assurance through the review of video recording is being developed. The data to evaluate the outcome or effectiveness of YODA was gathered from forty-nine participants who successfully completed the program since the inception of the program in July 1, 2012. Of note, YODA is a voluntary program where individuals charged with assault are offered the option to complete the program in return for alternative pleas. Once enrolled in YODA, completion is mandatory or the plea arrangement is forfeited. These individuals completed a pre-test/ post-test assessment packet during the first two sessions attempting to measure demographics and short term outcomes. Treatment progresses in three phases; referral and assessment, individual SFBT with the adolescent and ultimately family SFBT if family is willing to participate. The measures utilized in the assessment packet included the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM), the Solution Building Inventory (SBI), the Novaco Anger Scale and Provocation Inventory (NAS-PI) and the Multidimensional Adolescent Assessment Scale (MAAS). Program success was measured by the change in scores from pretest to posttest. Data was analyzed using paired sample t-tests to determine if changes in scores were statistically significant. The long term outcomes for YODA were measured by searching arrest records at six months and one year after program completion to determine whether participants reoffended. Results of short-term outcomes were clinically significant in a positive direction in particular in the MAAS where improved family functioning and less problems with parents were reported at post-tests. In addition, researchers reported none of the individuals who completed the YODA program had reoffended at the time of the study. The results of the study indicated YODA to be meeting short term and long term outcome goals as well as operational goals. Implications to the utility and effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy in programs such as YODA is promising as it not only incorporates the needs and strengths of the individual but those of family members as well. This approach can be particularly useful in working with youth involved in the criminal justice system as they come from an environment which can primarily focus on youths’ negative behaviors and to punish them for what they have done wrong up until this point in their lives. Using a strengths based perspective in working wit these individuals can be very powerful as many times these individuals come from a system where they may have been labeled as “defective or deviant” causing them to feel stuck in a path that may be difficult to get out of. A solution focused approach can clear the way for an adolescent who feels stuck in a problem saturated environment such as the criminal justice system.